

Lesson 8 | October 24, 2021

New Life in Christ

Study Text: Ephesians 2:1–22

Central Truth: Salvation by grace unites all believers in Christ.

Key Verse: Ephesians 2:8

By grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God (KJV).

God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God.(NLT).

Learning Objectives

- Students will gain a better understanding of the cultural tensions among believers within the first century Church, as well as why such tensions are relevant to us today.
- Students will be encouraged to view all Christians as brothers and sisters, as is taught in Scripture.
- Students will discover practical ways to act lovingly toward all Christians.

Introducing the Lesson

Say: One of the most important and encouraging aspects of serving God is recognizing the new life He gives us. In writing to the Christians at Ephesus, Paul was writing to people who were just beginning their new lives in Christ. Yet the principles he shared are timeless, and we do well to learn from the Ephesians as we study this lesson.

Opening Activity—Changed Life

Ask: How did your life change when you became a follower of Christ? (Give several students opportunity to share. Try to draw out responses from students who have been Christians only a short time as well as those who became Christians early in life.)

What are some cultural differences in the World and in Christ?

Say: Whether you have been a Christian for many years or only for a short time, it is critical that you continue to grow in the new life God gives to you. **One of the best ways to share your faith with others is to tell them how Jesus has changed your life.**(Share your highlights from the following text.)

In the last lesson, we discovered that God formed a plan from before creation to redeem humanity by sending Jesus to earth to become the sacrifice for sin. **In this lesson, we will see how that plan works out on an individual basis.** As we study, we will note

that many of the Jewish people had felt that they had an exclusive relationship with God. In writing to the Gentile Ephesians, Paul pointed out that this thinking is not accurate. God desires for all people to align with His plan and become a part of His family.

Likewise, we, too, must set aside our prejudices as we become a functioning part of God's family. Today's lesson will help us learn to do that more effectively.

Bob Hoekstra said, "Many people waste their lives by aiming to please themselves. Their lives are choked with self-indulgence. "And the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14). They have ignored the fact that pleasing self cannot lead to spiritual growth and Christlikeness. "We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves... For even Christ did not please Himself" (Romans 15:1, 3). Others live in carnal bondage to human opinions. Their consistent priority is to please people. This was part of King Saul's downfall. "Then Saul said to Samuel, 'I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice'" (1 Samuel 15:24). We cannot aim to please man and still serve God. "Do I seek to please men? For if I still pleased men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10).

Living to please God is what we were created for. This can never happen apart from faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please Him." Coming to the Lord in true biblical faith begins with a conviction that God exists. "For he who comes to God must believe that He is." Additionally, God-pleasing faith eagerly anticipates the Lord's gracious response to all who truly seek Him. "He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Although there are many blessings that result from pursuing the Lord, the ultimate reward is God Himself."

Part 1—Saved by Grace Through Faith

Once Dead

Ephesians 2:1–3

[Eph 2:1-3 KJV] 1 And you [hath he quickened], who were dead in trespasses and sins; 2 Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: 3 Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Say: Before people accept Jesus as Savior, they are living as servants of sin and Satan—whether they realize it or not. Many who do not walk with Christ will say that

they refuse to serve anyone—that they are masters of their own lives. Yet Scripture tells us that if we are not serving Christ, we serve sin (i.e., Matthew 6:24; Romans 7:25). While we likely were never actively trying to serve the devil, we aligned ourselves with him through a rebellious lifestyle. This is the natural state of all people. Following the priorities of the world leads us far from God. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Ephesians 2:1–3 is remarkable in one sense, as Paul—the great apostle and writer of much of the New Testament—identified himself as having formerly been numbered among the worst of sinners (see also 1 Timothy 1:12–17). He counted himself as having been among the followers of the devil. Such people live in rebellion against God. They follow their fleshly desires, in obedience to the devil himself, regardless of the impact on others or the consequences before God. Paul thought he was living a righteous life, but in reality he sought to find fulfillment through satisfying his lustful desires and prideful mind. Paul believed he was a child of God, but in reality, he was a child of wrath, on the road to God’s judgment.

All who have not submitted their lives to God through faith in Jesus are enemies of God (see James 4:4). It is not that God chooses to be our enemy, but rather it is the choice of the person who rejects the gift of salvation, which is freely offered. Those who refuse to accept God’s gift are spiritually dead (Ephesians 2:1).

Resource Packet Item 1: The Enemy of God

Distribute the work sheet and divide your class into small groups. Assign each group one of the Scripture passages. Ask the groups to share their summaries of the passages.

Discuss

? How did you justify your sinful decisions before you were saved?

? Looking back, in what ways did your life demonstrate that you were an enemy of God before you were saved?

Now Alive

Ephesians 2:4–10

[Eph 2:4-10 KJV] 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, 5 Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) 6 And hath raised [us] up together, and made [us] sit together in heavenly [places] in Christ Jesus: 7 That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in [his] kindness toward us through

Christ Jesus. 8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: [it is] the gift of God: 9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. 10 For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Say: The God we serve is a God of life—He has created life and values life. God breathed life into Adam at creation, and **He desires to breathe spiritual life into everyone who is currently spiritually dead. God did not wait to offer life until people were good enough to deserve the gift of everlasting life, for that would have been impossible. Instead, He offers new life to those who are in need of salvation through Christ.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul declared in Ephesians 2:4–5 that God gives mercy to those on the road to God’s judgment. Such marvelous mercy does not deny the fact that a sinful offense against God exists. Rather, in an act of mercy, God chooses to withhold the just consequences of that offense.

God’s mercy is based in His love for His creation. A worthy sacrifice was necessary to pay the price for the sins that human beings had committed against a righteous and holy God. Paul made it clear that Jesus’ death was that sacrifice (verse 5). And the good news of the gospel is not confined to spiritual freedom. After Jesus rose from the dead, He ascended to a seat of divine glory at the right hand of the Father, where He makes intercession for us on our behalf (see Romans 8:34). **Every Christian who identifies with Jesus through faith shares in the blessings that Jesus has obtained through His sacrifice. Christians have access to the heavenly places because we are justified through Christ—that is, we are able to stand righteous before God because of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, the Son of God (see Romans 5:6–9; Galatians 3:11,24). Paul made it clear that the believer has done nothing to deserve the rights associated with salvation. It is a gift of grace.**

[Rom 5:6-9 KJV] 6 For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8 But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him. [Gal 3:11, 24 KJV] 11 But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, [it is] evident: for, The just shall live by faith. ... 24 Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster [to bring us] unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Salvation is a gift to all who believe in Jesus. Indeed, we are saved by grace through faith (Ephesians 2:8–9). **Faith is more than just belief—more than mental assent that God exists. Faith is the firm conviction that Jesus is the Son of God and His death and resurrection have made us right with God.** Furthermore, Paul declared that when we truly believe this, we ought to live in

obedience to Him. We ought to do the things God has called us to do, to live in the way He called us to live. Faith, then, is initial belief that bears out in a lifestyle that reflects a love for God and a faith in His promises.

Discuss

? What are some privileges you enjoy as a result of your being a Christian?

? How can someone tell if he or she really believes something?

Part 2—One Body in Christ

Once Divided

Ephesians 2:11–12

[Eph 2:11-12 KJV] 11 Wherefore remember, that ye [being] in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands; 12 That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world:

Say: Paul reminded the Ephesian believers that, as Gentiles, they were not part of the people of God during the Old Testament era. That is not to say Gentiles could not come to faith; we see examples of them following God in the Old Testament. But in the Jewish community, Gentiles were referred to in a derogatory manner as the uncircumcised. God had set His people apart from other nations through circumcision. **If a man was not circumcised, he was regarded to be outside of God's family.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Old Testament times, the Gentiles stood outside of the camp of Israel. They could follow God only if they renounced their own heritage and followed the way of the Jewish people. As aliens living outside the citizenship of the people of Israel, they did not know of the covenant promises God had given to His people (Ephesians 2:11–12).

As an outsider, or an alien, the Gentile did not have spiritual privileges that came from association with God. The covenants made with Abraham, Moses, and David did not hold any benefit to the Gentiles. Their lives were spiritually empty. Gentiles in the Old Testament era lived almost exclusively in cultures that worshiped idols and tolerated the Jewish people or, worse yet, held fervent animosity against them.

Today, it is important for Christians to recognize the hopeless state they occupied before they met Jesus. **There is no other way to be in relationship with God than**

through His gift of redemption. Before salvation, we did not know what we lacked. We may well not have even known that we were lost. But now that we have received God's gift of salvation, we must never take His gift for granted or forget how utterly lost we would have been if it were not for God's love for us, seen in the precious sacrifice of Christ.

Resource Packet Item 2: A Different Way of Thinking

Distribute the work sheet and work through it as a class or individually. Discuss the importance of being sensitive to the thoughts and feelings of unbelievers without condoning sinful thinking or actions.

Discuss

? How is a non-Christian today like a Gentile in the Old Testament era??

? In what ways might a Gentile who found salvation have been more appreciative than a Jew who had a long heritage as being part of the people of God? What might we learn from this today?

Now United

Ephesians 2:13–18

[Eph 2:13-18 KJV] 13 But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. 14 For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition [between us]; 15 Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, [even] the law of commandments [contained] in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, [so] making peace; 16 And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: 17 And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh. 18 For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Say: Jesus fulfilled the Law. Now all people, both Jews and Gentiles, can have access to God through Jesus' death and resurrection. There is no longer a Jewish family and a Gentile family. Now there is one family; all who accept God's gift of salvation by faith make up God's family (Share your highlights from the following text.)

In Ephesians 2:13–14, Paul used an image of a person who had once been pushed away but is now drawn near to describe the Gentiles becoming members of God's family. God's love was not limited to a small segment of the world. Jesus died on the cross and rose from the grave so that all who would follow Him could experience everlasting life.

In verse 14, Paul used the word “peace” in describing the newfound condition of the Gentile believers. (More specifically, Jesus is our peace.) **Here, peace is a translation of the Greek word *eirene* (where we get the word irenic), and it reminds us of the Hebrew word shalom, which also includes the aspect of right standing before God.** When one has peace with God, that person need not fear or worry. Peace is based on trust that God cares for us. The Gentiles who accepted salvation through Christ could experience this peace just as the Jews did when they believed.

The peace Paul referred to also addressed the unity that was to exist between the Gentile and Jewish believers. From the beginnings of the Church, obedience to the Law was the sticking point between Jews and Gentiles. Jesus himself, through His life and ministry, was the fulfillment of the Law. In accepting by faith His sacrifice on the cross, both Jews and Gentiles were ultimately accepting the Law as being fulfilled.

As we examine verse 15, we see that Paul recognized two people groups existing in the world prior to the sacrifice of Christ: the Jews and the Gentiles. Through Christ it was possible to take these two segments of society, naturally opposed to one another, and **create a new, unified people.** There was not to be a Jewish Christian group and a Gentile Christian group. Instead, there was to be one people group that was jointly reconciled to God, and who would have peace with God and with one another. In Ephesians 2:13–18, the themes of reconciliation with God and with one another are intertwined.

Paul concluded this section by stating that Jesus’ message of peace with God was for both those who were near to God through the Law and those who were living far from God. **Both Jew and Gentile had fallen out of spiritual alignment with God. Both needed to be reconciled to God. Both needed the ultimate sacrifice for sin, who is Jesus Christ. Now both had access to the Father through one Spirit (verse 18).**

Discuss

? How have you experienced God’s peace in your life?

? What is the difference between keeping the Law and living in obedience to Jesus

Part 3—Citizens of God’s Household

We Are Fellow Citizens

Ephesians 2:19–20

[Eph 2:19-20 KJV] 19 Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of

God; 20 And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner [stone];

Say: Prejudice and bigotry are a tragic curse on humanity. Unfortunately, such attitudes can make their way into the Church. In the first century, some Jewish Christians were trying to keep the Gentile Christians from fellowshiping with them. **Paul made it clear that the only requirement to being a part of the Church is faith in Jesus.** (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Once they had been alienated from God, but Paul pointed out that they were no longer strangers. They had as much right to citizenship in the kingdom of God as did the redeemed Jews. Gentiles could rightly be counted as family members within the household of God (Ephesians 2:19–20).

Then Paul shifted his metaphor slightly, from a household to a physical house. He talked about the foundation of the house which is made up of the apostles, the prophets, and Jesus, who is the Cornerstone. **The Church was built through the Spirit-led labors of apostolic ministry. Similarly, the ministry of prophets served to proclaim and exhort the message of the Lord.**

Paul was not equating the leaders of the Early Church with Jesus. Rather, the apostle was clear that Jesus is the standard upon which the Church is built. When building a temporal structure, the cornerstone is the first stone set in masonry (brick or stone) construction. It is used to guide the rest of the building. All the other stones or bricks will be set in reference to this stone. As Christians, we recognize Christ as the beginning, or foundation, of the Church, and we know that the rest of the Church is measured and built according to His righteous standard.

Later in Ephesians, Paul would tell the Ephesian Christians how God uses the apostles and the prophets, along with evangelists, pastors, and teachers to build up the Church. **While leaders in the local church, and the larger Church as a whole, are important, they are no more important than the other parts of the church. The discipleship process, which leaders are wise to employ, helps individual Christians discover their gifts and the role that they play in the function of the Church.**

Discuss

? What are some ways that prejudice manifests itself in the Church today?

? How have leaders in your church helped in building up members of the church?

Resource Packet Item 3: Reconcilable Differences

Distribute the case study. Have the students read it and respond to the questions. You may do this as a class or in small groups, depending on available time.

We Are a Dwelling Place for God

Ephesians 2:21–22

[Eph 2:21-22 KJV] 21 In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: 22 In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Say: As New Testament believers, we know that God no longer dwells in structures of wood or stone. His presence is not confined to a temple that would require us to travel to meet with Him. Instead, God dwells in His Church—a body that is made up of individuals who love Him and love one another. Yet God’s presence is disrupted by conflict and chaos. Rather, He calls us to live in unity and harmony with those who are fellow followers of Jesus. The Church should reflect the One they represent. (Share your highlights from the following text.)

Paul emphasized the importance of unity among God’s people by using the image of a well-constructed building that was joined together, rather than being torn apart. It is not difficult for Christians even today to grasp the causes and consequences of a church being torn apart by things like strife, anger, selfishness, or jealousy. Paul stated that God desires to dwell in a Church that is unified (Ephesians 2:21–22).

Paul ended verse 21 with the phrase “in the Lord.” (NLT). He then concluded verse 22 with the phrase “by the Spirit.” This highlights the reality that those who are in Christ and are led by the Spirit are the habitations of God. The holy temple is no longer an external fixture that priests must enter to encounter God, but now the Holy Spirit dwells within the Christian.

Paul made it clear that there is no such thing as “solo Christianity.” The context of his letter emphasizes the corporate nature of the Church. Although Christ dwells in each of us, the Church is made up of all believers collectively, interacting as a singular body—the body of Christ. **There cannot be “Church A” and “Church B” today, any more than there could be a Jewish Church and a Gentile Church in New Testament times. There is one Church, dwelling together in the love of the Lord.**

Discuss

? What causes Christians to divide and try to live out the Christian life solo, or in their own like-minded groups, rather than as the Church?

? How would you describe what a healthy and unified Church “looks like”?

What Is God Saying to Us?

Say: Paul confronted the prejudices that existed in the Church during the first century, declaring that such prejudices should not be there. When a person has placed faith in

Jesus, he or she is part of God's family—a "full member," whether Jew or Gentile, male or female, rich or poor (see Galatians 3:28). There are no favorite children in His family. We must examine ourselves to see if we have pride or prejudice within our church or in our hearts. All those who believe in Jesus are spiritual brothers and sisters. God dwells in the midst of a Church committed to love Him and love one another.

Living It Out

Ministry in Action

- Seek to build relationships with Christians who do not attend your local church.
- View those who hold different non-essential doctrinal beliefs with love and acceptance as fellow believers.
- Prayerfully examine yourself, seeking to identify areas of Christian prejudice in your life. As needed, ask God to help you find a renewal of your mind and attitudes.

Daily Bible Readings

Monday:

Sin's Consequence.
Genesis 3:14–19

[Gen 3:14-19 KJV] 14 And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou hast done this, thou [art] cursed above all cattle, and above every beast of the field; upon thy belly shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life: 15 And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel. 16 Unto the woman he said, I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou shalt bring forth children; and thy desire [shall be] to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee. 17 And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed [is] the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat [of] it all the days of thy life; 18 Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; 19 In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou [art], and unto dust shalt thou return.

Tuesday:

Unity Invokes Grace.
2 Chronicles 30:13–20

[2Ch 30:13-20 KJV] 13 And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great congregation. 14 And they arose and took away the altars that [were] in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast [them] into the brook Kidron. 15 Then they killed the passover on the fourteenth [day] of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought in the burnt offerings into the house of the LORD. 16 And they stood in their place after their manner, according to the law of Moses

the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood, [which they received] of the hand of the Levites. 17 For [there were] many in the congregation that were not sanctified: therefore the Levites had the charge of the killing of the passovers for every one [that was] not clean, to sanctify [them] unto the LORD. 18 For a multitude of the people, [even] many of Ephraim, and Manasseh, Issachar, and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it was written. But Hezekiah prayed for them, saying, The good LORD pardon every one 19 [That] prepareth his heart to seek God, the LORD God of his fathers, though [he be] not [cleansed] according to the purification of the sanctuary. 20 And the LORD hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people.

Wednesday:

Forgiveness for Transgressions
Psalm 32:1–11

[Psa 32:1-11 KJV] 1 [[A Psalm] of David, Maschil.] Blessed [is he whose] transgression [is] forgiven, [whose] sin [is] covered. 2 Blessed [is] the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit [there is] no guile. 3 When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. 4 For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah. 5 I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. Selah. 6 For this shall every one that is godly pray unto thee in a time when thou mayest be found: surely in the floods of great waters they shall not come nigh unto him. 7 Thou [art] my hiding place; thou shalt preserve me from trouble; thou shalt compass me about with songs of deliverance. Selah. 8 I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go: I will guide thee with mine eye. 9 Be ye not as the horse, [or] as the mule, [which] have no understanding: whose mouth must be held in with bit and bridle, lest they come near unto thee. 10 Many sorrows [shall be] to the wicked: but he that trusteth in the LORD, mercy shall compass him about. 11 Be glad in the LORD, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all [ye that are] upright in heart.

Thursday:

Be Born Again.
John 3:3–8

[Jhn 3:3-8 KJV] 3 Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. 4 Nicodemus saith unto him, How can a man be born when he is old? can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born? 5 Jesus answered, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and [of] the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. 6 That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. 7 Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again. 8 The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the

sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.

Friday:

One in Christ.
John 17:20–26

[Jhn 17:20-26 KJV] 20 Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; 21 That they all may be one; as thou, Father, [art] in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me. 22 And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one: 23 I in them, and thou in me, that they may be made perfect in one; and that the world may know that thou hast sent me, and hast loved them, as thou hast loved me. 24 Father, I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which thou hast given me: for thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world. 25 O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee: but I have known thee, and these have known that thou hast sent me. 26 And I have declared unto them thy name, and will declare [it]: that the love wherewith thou hast loved me may be in them, and I in them.

Saturday:

Unity in Christ's Body.
1 Corinthians 12:12–14

[1Co 12:12-14 KJV] 12 For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also [is] Christ. 13 For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether [we be] Jews or Gentiles, whether [we be] bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. 14 For the body is not one member, but many.